Grande Prairie Herald

Historical Edition.

WM. C. PRATT BROUGHT FIRST PRINTING PRESS OVER THE OLD EDSON TRAIL.

The pioneer days of any country are usually the happiest and best of all. Very little trouble, no worries and everybody having a good time.

Early days in Grande Prairie were no exception. Many of the gatherings resembled a gala reunion of one large family, and so I believe many of the old timers will thoroughly enjoy turning back the pages of history and again gather at Lake Saskatoon or Grande Prairie once more to enjoy one of those celebrations which were famous for community hospitality and building of everlasting friendships.

As the first Editor and Publisher in the Peace River Country and founder of the GRANDE PRAIRIE HERALD I wish to congratulate the present publishers on the publications of an anniversary number dedicated to the pioneers and their early experiences.

The Peace River Country is known far and wide as the seedbed of Canada which justifies a slogan given to the country in 1914 by the HERALD. "The Garden Bed of the Dominion of Canada." The Grande Prairie district and in fact the entire Peace River in the early days was settled with as thrifty and sociable a class of people as ever graced any country with their citizenship. Practically everyone has made good even in the face of inadequate transportation facilities.

If you were to ask this question of every early settler, "Why did you come to the Peace River?" the answer would invariably be "We wanted good, clean land in a new country so that we could build for the future and produce for the bread basket of the world."

The writer was no exception. The summer of 1912 found me in a mining camp at the head of the Portland Canal on the Alaskan border, suffering from the effects of a mining boom. It was then I took a solemn oath to myself that my next move would be to a good farming community where production was sure. No more mining booms but instead the stablility of farm products for as everyone knows "Wheat is as good as gold."

The wonderful opportunities of the Peace River were unfolded to me by one of the early settlers, the late Mr. Alpheus Patterson, who also was my father-in-law. From a lengthy letter he wrote me about this time, the following extract is taken: "I cannot find words too strong to urge you to come at once to the Peace River Country. It has everything that any other country possesses and much more. It is the Last Great West and offers more opportunities to the man of moderate means than any other part of the world."

With such a promise in hand, it is not surprising that early summer of 1912 saw Mrs. Pratt, myself and small son Garnet enroute, via Vancouver, Edmonton and Edson.

On arrival at Edmonton we found the Peace River the main topic of conversation. The Canadian Northern were building in the spring. The survey was completed, charter granted

bonds sold and money in the bank. The charter route was from Onoway on the main line through the Grande Prairie district to Ground Hog Mountain and thence to the Pacific Coast. Even literature distributed by the Dominion government showed the railway completed to this country.

No person who came over the Edson Trail during the summer months will ever forget it. The provincial government had made a feeble effort to construct a trail, of which it has been said "It served a purpose but served it very badly." What was seen along the trail beggars description. Mud holes and then more mud holes, some a few yards and some many miles long.

Teams hauling loads wallering up to their bodies in mud, making only a couple of miles a day in places. Men, women and children enduring hardships that brought the best out of each, but with hope and grim determination written on the faces of all. The weak and easily discouraged turned back at the Athabasca, the strong and determined kept on and on. The trail must end some place and then 160 acres of land, home and eventually prosperity.

That is one of the reasons that the early settlers were all "He" men and "Real" women for I am told that the Grourard route was worse. Eventually we arrived at Sturgeon Lake and after paying our respects to the various Fur Trading Posts, the Roman Catholic Mission and the Indian Chief we pushed on. In due time we swam our horses across the famous Smoky river and after climbing the Smoky hill there lay the Grande Prairie district.

What a sight! As far as the eye could carry, open land slightly rolling virgin soil only awaiting the plow of the settler to make it productive. My trail the top of Kleskun Hill, he going to a homestead and I to Grande Prairie. Here I found everybody busy. Farmers getting their improvements made, merchants selling goods and buying furs, carpenters as busy as they could possibly be. And all of them, banker, merchant, farmer, optimistic and hustling.

It was then that the idea of starting a weekly newspaper was suggested by Mr. Patterson. "You are a printer by trade. This country needs a paper and in my opinion you are the right man in the right place." Sold on the idea I left for Edmonton via Edson to purchase a plant so as to be able to return on the snow.

The Toronto Type Foundry told me I would have to pay cash for my outfit as in their opinion I was going out of civilization with the plant. 250 miles off a railway did not appeal to their credit manager. I therefore had to cut my cloth according to my purse. Arrangements were made with Jack Patterson, Bernard Sully and Jobe Hamilton to come out after the plant which consisted of a Gordon foot press, a few cases of type and a sharp butcher knife for a paper cutter.

Arriving at Grande Prairie the weather was hovering around 40 below. No door of any building was wide enough to let the press in so it was necessary to skid the press off beside the building that is now occupied as a Masonic Temple. When the weather moderated, Pete Roy and Allan

Wilson built a building around the press. In later years when the plant was being moved to a new building they could not get the press out of the building and I was called upon to explain how it got in the building. It might be here said that no guarantee of subscription list was requested for the reason that had any part of the press or outfit been either missing or broken I might have found myself unable to publish a paper. Any person wishing to subscribe could leave their money with the Union Bank and if we published it would be accepted. Everything was in order and on the 25th day of March, 1912, at 3 o'clock in the morning we placed the form in the press and "presto, change" the birth of an new addition to Alberta Journalism was recorded in the GRANDE PRAIRIE HERALD" The late Pat Kelly was the first subscriber and received the first copy off the press.

(A facsimile reporduction of this first edition will be found in the centre of section three of this issue)

A country newspaper man is not supposed to have any money. In our particular case we were true to form. We owned the plant, a keg of ink, and some paper. We were as free af money as a frog is of feathers. Every business must organize and this we did, but on the closed corporation principle. Mrs. Pratt was subscription manager, secretary-treasurer and society editor. Every printing office must have a "Printers Devil" or apprentice so, Garnet R. Pratt, then 4 years old got that appointment, while I officiated as general manager, news editor and printer.

The future, however, was no bed of roses. We brought in supplies which we considered would be sufficient but early in the year we ran short of the white paper THE HERALD was published on. Orders were sent to Calgar for paper But no freight was possible to get through on account of the condition of the roads. Only registered mail and letters. Paper we must have. We had some colored poster paper and each week we appeared in a different color until the press outside wondered what we were celebrating. We gave a fresh excuse each week. A New York paper happened in some way to get a copy of the HERALD when we were in different colors and wrote a very elaborate account of the printer who went 250 miles from civilization with a newspaper plant. He likened us to a Chameleon, a small animal that changes its color to suit its surroundings. We were down to a roll of wrapping paper when Caywood & Robbs mail pack train pulled in with a couple of sacks of white paper that we hadordered forward by registered mail and each week for some time after we received one sack. The paper was registered and they had to bring it through. Mr. Caywood told others what he thought but treated us with silent contempt.

PAPER SOLD TO OBLINGERS.

In the early summer of 1915 the paper was leased to Oblinger Bros., who were printers by trade but were homesteading at Spirit River. Later the same year they purchased the business.

The HERALD has since grown up. It has passed through a few changes in ownership and management. Oblinger Bros. had associated with them in 1916 Mr. Chas. Kitchen, a printer who worked for us on the paper in 1914 and who is now owner and editor of the Peace River BLOCK NEWS of Dawson Creek. George Duncan succeeded Oblinger Bros. and was a partner with Kitchen and then came the present owner and publisher, Mr. Chas. W. Rederick, who also owns the Peace River RECORD.

It is still the Grande Prairie HERALD, its course has always been pretty straight, from a political and religious point of view, independent, and may it always keep up its proud boast of never having missed an issue.